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ABSTRACT

Exemplary community service programs are isolated and relatively few in number. Furthermore, the motivating stimulus for most exceptional community service activities has not been the concern of community college governing boards, administrators, or state politicians, but instead has been the availability of federal or foundation funding sources. Excluding programs funded from external sources, community colleges have not generally been accountable to the broad heterogenous community that they are designed to serve. Although community colleges offer some of the services of an area university, and some of the services of an area vocational school, many have been unable to identify and clarify the community college's one truly unique mission--community services. To be accountable, community colleges must conduct frequent community needs assessments, and take appropriate follow-up action. At present, community colleges have very little community services accountability, and unless we can interrupt the traditional credit-hour fixation, influence funding patterns, and design new yardsticks for measuring community college productivity, there is little hope for improvement. (Author/NHM)

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# COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMMUNITY SERVICES:

## The Question of Accountability

My remarks on community services accountability will be brief. They will be general and somewhat directed. While not exactly a pleasant perspective it remains as a practitioner's perspective. My own accountability for today will hinge upon the degree of stimulation I provide and the temperature of the discussions that follow.

We are all well aware of the rapid expansion of the comprehensive community services concept in our community colleges. We probably are aware primarily because of the exceptional amount of verbalization and even larger amounts of printed publicity on the subject. However, how many of us are really aware of the relative health of the community services operations in these very same institutions? How do our governing boards, administrative officers, and legislators fare when the community services accountability question is placed squarely before them? From my perspective as a practitioner - they fare poorly.

I firmly believe that if many of us could distribute copies of our stated institutional philosophy throughout our respective districts we would be amazed at the number of people that could not honestly associate those same glowing statements with the local community college from which they came. This is not to say that all institutions do not live up to their stated goals and objectives. Some indeed do - and do a very excellent and commendable job. However, exemplary community service programs appear to be isolated and relatively few in number. In my estimation they are indeed rare and could never be held up as the community college example.

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In my opinion, most of the exceptional community service activities have not developed out of any real honest concern on the part of our governing boards, administration, or the state politicians. Rather, I think they have resulted mainly from available federal or foundation funding sources. These funds seem to be the motivating stimuli for much community service programming. Unfortunately, I don't see the same degree of enthusiasm and broad college support for this type of activity when those external funds are absent. It appears that substantial community services programming is needed and supported most often when we find our own external funds. I do not believe that the typical taxpayer would view this as any real record of community services accountability.

For those that may question the previous charge let me ask: How many of you have community services budgets (excluding external funds) exceeding three percent of the institutional total--or even two or one percent for that matter? How long has it been since your board of governors or your president has requested a community services program report when budget reductions were not the motivating factor? How many of your newly elected or appointed board members have requested an in-depth orientation on the rationale and adequacy of funding to fulfill the community services obligations? How many of your community services staff have the same job security and institutional fringe benefits available to them as do the more traditional faculty and staff: And, how many of your college presidents and board members have concerned themselves enough to actively lobby the state legislature for a more equable funding formula that is based upon services rendered rather than the narrowly conceived student credit hour FTE computations? Would they have done more for the traditional degree programs were they in a similar position? An honest answer

to these questions would surprise many--and in my estimation would not speak well for our accountability in the community services area.

Simply stated, and excluding those rare programs funded from external sources, we have not generally been accountable to that broad heterogenous community population that we say we must service. Neither have we lived up to even the most conservative expectations outlined by community college leaders only a few years ago. In too many instances, the community college has developed into little more than an awkward, and sometimes frustrated cross, between a university and an area vocational school. We struggle, trying to identify and clarify our one truly unique mission--community services.

Many community college professionals will counter--"But we offer what our community wants. There is no demand for special programming that is different." To those sincere individuals I must ask--how long has it been since you have conducted a comprehensive and scientific community needs analysis? The answer could be surprising. And we still call ourselves the "comprehensive community college."

The community services needs are obvious. To be accountable, all that is required is an honest community needs assessment, and appropriate follow up action. But, do we really want to confront these obvious community needs? For if we did why do we not respond more effectively to the older adult suffering within many of our more affluent communities: Or the ghetto living conditions on the other side of town: Or the tragic drug problems too prevalent among our youth: Or the confused and sometimes undirected local efforts regarding mass transit, pollution control, and land-use management: Or the apathy permeating our citizenry removing them from the political decision-making machinery that

affects us all. Too, let us not forget the very special needs facing today's women and the unemployed. These are our communities' concerns--these should be our institutional concerns. And it will take more than a few scattered continuing education short-courses, workshops and conferences to produce satisfactory results. To ameliorate these conditions is our charge -- Our uniqueness. Our future as a viable and versatile "peoples institutions" will rest upon our ability to alter our course and firmly integrate our unique community service commitment.

Somehow we must rekindle that original community services spirit inherent in the community college movement. As community services professionals it is our job to insist upon the "educational supermarket" as our model. We must demand equal shelf space for our special program packages. We must not compromise our flexibilities where academic conformity is the smoother rut to follow. We must also insist upon equal access to the institutional support services without apologies. Accountability then rests upon that strength, that commitment, and the ability to communicate the existing institutional hyprocisy.

Responsible criticism generally requires responsible alternatives or suggestions. To protect whatever professional creditibility I may still have, I suggest that concerned community service leaders and others can take several positive actions:

1. Lobby more energetically for a revised funding formula for their community colleges which incorporates the community services mission. If necessary, funds could be earmarked for that purpose with institutional support costs included.

2. Push for an institutional or state requirement which would mandate periodic local needs analysis to ascertain the extent and nature of community problems and concerns.
3. Demand a periodic and formalized board and/or administrative review of community services programming alongside a parallel analysis of institutional commitment and budgetary allocations.
4. Urge that a specially designed educational program for newly appointed board members be required which would orient them to their broad community service obligations.
5. And last, I would suggest that we seed administrative equality within our respective institutions providing for more effective administrative interaction. The position should provide for a wide range of responsibilities cutting across all segments of the institution.

You can readily see that my position on community services accountability is - that we have none or relatively little at best. Furthermore, I'm convinced that unless we can interrupt the traditional credit-hour fixation, influence improved funding patterns, and design new yardsticks for measuring community college productivity there is little hope for improvement. Unless significant progress is made soon in this direction we could grow to doubt the wisdom of our continued existence.

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

Thank you.

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